

Housing in Albany, New York:  
An Analysis of the Present and  
a Look at the Future

by

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## HOUSING IN ALBANY: AN ANALYSIS OF THE PRESENT

### AND A LOOK AT THE FUTURE

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Anyone who lives in Albany knows there is a serious housing problem. For middle income families housing is expensive and scarce; for low income families housing which isn't substandard is next to impossible to find.

But just how bad is Albany's housing problem?

A look at the U.S. Census of Housing and the numerous planning and urban renewal studies of the past decade, shed some factual light on the dimensions of Albany's housing problem. Although Albany's housing situation is not unique, it is, in many respects, much graver than the situation in most other American cities.

As in many other cities in the Northeast, Albany housing is extremely old. Over 50% was built in the 19th century: In Arbor Hill and the South End the percentage surpasses 75%. The 1970 U.S. Census of Housing shows that only 16.5% of Albany dwelling units have been built since 1950.

In addition to being old, much of Albany housing is deteriorated and sub-standard. In 1967 a survey by the Albany Urban Redevelopment Agency revealed that 43.5% of all the City's housing units were not in sound condition. In parts of the South End close to 90% of the units were found to be deficient. These estimates are conservative, as they are based on exterior surveys of structural elements only. Moreover, these estimates are now more than six years old.

Although the 1970 U.S. Census does not provide information on the condition of buildings, it does show that 2,000 units lack some or all plumbing and 1,773 units are overcrowded.

Albany housing is also in extremely short supply. A 1971 report issued by the Albany County Planning Board states that only 1.7% of Albany units are vacant. ~~generally accepted as the minimum necessary to provide a range for choice~~ A vacancy rate of 4% is generally accepted as the minimum necessary to provide a range for choice in price, size and quality. In Albany there is very little choice, especially in rental units, and the problem is compounded for families with small children or pets.

It would be reasonable to expect the City and State governments to help alleviate the shortage. In fact the opposite is true! In 1963 a State housing study of Albany, conducted at the request of Mayor Corning, stated that Albany needed immediately a minimum of 8,800 low rent and middle income units.

The response of state government was swift. Within a year, Rockefeller demolished 3,700 units to make way for his South Mall. Approximately 1,000 more units were then demolished to make way for the Mall arterial and the other new arterials in Albany.

The City also did its share during the 1960's. Areas of the South End and Arbor Hill were leveled to make way for urban renewal. Urban renewal does not always mean housing, however. Albany's first urban renewal project was the "North Project" on Broadway (across from Schaefer Brewery and Boardman's store). It replaced 97 units of housing with commercial buildings. In the South End several acres of housing were leveled to make way for a shopping center and a parking lot.

The Albany Housing Authority has made a remarkable contribution to the problem. During the 1960's numerous blocks of old slums in the South End were replaced with the Green Street and Morton Avenue high rise apartments. In these "new slums," the Albany Housing Authority has duplicated the previous conditions of cheap construction, lack of maintenance, poor security, and overall deterioration.

In all, 5,600 housing units in the City of Albany were demolished between 1960 and 1970. That is 12% of the housing stock! During these ten years, only 3,200 housing units were built, a net deficit of 2,400. To make matters worse, over 800 of the 3,200 new units were in the Albany Housing Authority's new slums.

### The Future of Albany Housing

Though the present situation is bad enough, the future looks much worse.

A recent Albany County Planning Board survey of developers concentrating on apartment house construction in the Capital District, revealed that none of them has built an apartment complex in the City of Albany. On the other hand, these same developers spent the latter part of the sixties in hectic building of apartments in Menands, and the Towns of Colonie, Bethlehem and Guilderland. Why is there little to encourage private development in Albany?

Another factor is the Nixon administration's cut back of Federal housing and urban renewal funds, which has resulted in the postponement of many of Albany's planned public housing projects. Probably most will not be built.

The State Office of Planning Coordination projects a one percent per year rate of dilapidation (a term used technically to describe housing which has major structural defects and is basically uninhabitable) for all existing housing. This is about 500 units a year for Albany. This figure is probably quite conservative given the age and degree of deterioration of the present housing stock. In any case, it means that at least 5,000 additional units will become uninhabitable within the next ten years.

Unless radical changes are made in Albany's housing policies and programs, it is unlikely that enough housing will be built to replace these 5,000 units. This does not include replacement of currently dilapidated units and provision of additional units to alleviate the severe shortage of rental units.

What can be done?

While Federal and State government subsidies must be relied upon for any significant quantity of additional new housing, local government sets the basic policies and priorities which determine the quality of the housing supply.

To immediately begin improving the quality of housing in the City,

Albany can:

- Initiate a vigorous and thorough housing code enforcement program aimed at the City's slum landlords who allow their property to deteriorate;
- Transfer tax delinquent properties without cost to housing rehabilitation organizations, such as Albany's Capital Housing Rehabilitation Corp.;
- Transfer tax delinquent property to individuals, on the condition the house is brought up to standards and is lived in by the owners;

--Provide seed money to establish non-profit community organizations and cooperatives engaged in housing rehabilitation and home improvements;

--Make greater efforts to collect delinquent property taxes from slum landlords. At present, some slum landlords rent a building without paying taxes or making repairs for a period of four years. Only after five years ~~has~~ can the property be taken for back taxes under present laws;

--Set aside a fund to provide low-interest and no-interest loans to property owners to bring their homes up to acceptable standards;

--Widely distribute information and guidelines on housing standards, housing repair and maintenance, maintenance duties and responsibilities of landlords, and the rights and responsibilities of tenants;

--Discourage and even prohibit demolition of housing units in the City which are potentially sound. Many such units are being demolished in the South Mall area by speculators and the City itself continually demolishes tax delinquent, substandard units;

--Investigate measures (including legal action) which would force the State to replace the more than 4,000 units it demolished to make way for the South Mall and its expressways;

--Investigate the possibilities of building low cost "In-fill" housing. This involves placing new, mass-produced modular units on ~~xxxxx~~<sup>o</sup> vacant lots throughout the City.

These programs could be initiated by Mayor Corning now. While they won't immediately add thousands of units to the housing stock, they will substantially decrease the overall rate of deterioration and will gradually bring more and more units up to standard. They will also have a multiplier effect, encouraging other citizens and private contractors to make improvements and build additional units. Thus, more of Albany's neighborhoods will again become desirable areas in which to live.



# HOUSING DATA

## CITY OF ALBANY

### POPULATION : CITY OF ALBANY

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>POP</u>	<u>CHANGE</u>	<u>% CHANGE</u>
1920	113,344	+ 13,091	+13.1
1930	127,412	+ 14,068	+12.4
1940	130,577	+ 3,165	+ 2.5
1950	134,995	+ 4,418	+ 3.4
1960	129,726	- 5,269	- 3.9
1970	115,781	- 13,945	-10.7

SOURCE : NYS STATISTICAL YEARBOOK, 1972

### NON WHITE POPULATION IN ALBANY

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>TOTAL</u>	<u>%</u>
1950	5,881	4.4
1960	10,972	8.5
1970	14,930	12.9

SOURCE : NYS STATISTICAL YEARBOOK, 1972

### HOUSING UNITS (1960 AND 1970)

	<u>CITY OF ALBANY</u>	<u>ALBANY COUNTY (excluding City)</u>	<u>TOTAL ALB. COUNTY</u>
TOTAL UNITS 1960	46,200	44,777	90,977
TOTAL UNITS 1970	43,803	54,270	98,073
CHANGE	- 2,397	+ 9,493	+7,096
NEW UNITS, 1960-1970	3,200	12,408	15,608
UNITS DEMOLISHED	5,597	2,965	8,562
% UNITS DEMOLISHED (1960-70)	12 %	6.6 %	9.4 %

SOURCE : 1960 AND 1970 US CENSUS OF HOUSING

# SUMMARY OF STRUCTURAL AND HOUSING CONDITIONS

## ALBANY, NEW YORK

Total Buildings Surveyed	23,020	
Residential	19,881	
Non-residential	3,139	
All Buildings Surveyed	23,020	-100-
Standard	13,868	60.3%
Deficient	6,857	29.8%
Substandard	1,912	8.3%
Dilapidated	383	1.6%
Residential Buildings	19,881	-100-
Standard	12,259	61.7%
Deficient	5,848	29.4%
Substandard	1,490	7.5%
Dilapidated	284	1.4%
Non-residential Buildings	3,139	-100-
Standard	1,609	51.3%
Deficient	1,009	32.1%
Substandard	422	13.4%
Dilapidated	99	3.2%
Dwelling Units	41,207	-100-
Standard	23,268	56.5%
Deficient	17,700	42.7%
Substandard	5,700	13.8%
Dilapidated	670	1.6%

Source: Department of Urban Redevelopment, City of Albany,  
Field Surveys, 1967.

## AGE OF HOUSING UNITS (1970)

	<u>CITY OF ALB.</u>	<u>ALB. COUNTY</u>	<u>NYS. AVG. (INSIDE SMSA)</u>
built before 1939	74.7 %	58.3 %	54.2 %
1940 - 1949	8.8	9.2	11.4
1950 - 1959	9.1	16.5	17.8
1960 - 1968	6.8	13.8	} 16.6
1969 - MAR. 1970	0.6	2.2	

SOURCE: 1970 U.S. CENSUS OF HOUSING

## SUMMARY CHARACTERISTICS OF ALBANY HOUSING UNITS (1970)

	<u>TOTAL CITY POP.</u>	<u>NON WHITE POP.</u>
Total Pop.	115,781	14,132
Number of Housing Units	43,803	4,374
MEDIAN # OF ROOMS	5.1	4.7
MEDIAN # OF PERSONS	2.1	2.6
OWNER Occupied	40.6 %	16.2 %
Lacking some or all plumbing	4.6 %	6.1 %
Overcrowded	4.3 %	12.6 %
Owner Occupied, Median Value	\$ 20,800.	\$ 11,900.
With more than 1 Bathroom	18.4 %	8.4 %
In Apartment Bldg. (5 or more units)	21.8 %	27.0 %
With AIR Conditioning	23.3 %	6.4 %
Moved into unit 1969-1970	19.4 %	26.7 %
With 2 or more Autos	15.7 %	5.9 %
With Washing Machine	56.8 %	43.6 %
With Clothes Dryer	24.1 %	7.4 %
With Dishwasher	11.4 %	2.2 %
With T.V.	95.4 %	92.5 %

SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS OF HOUSING, 1970

## LAND USE IN ALBANY (1966)

	<u>ACRES</u>	<u>% OF DEVELOPED LAND</u>	<u>% OF TOTAL CITY LAND</u>	<u>CHANGE SINCE 1958</u>
RESIDENTIAL	3,107	38.0 %	25.4 %	+14.9 %
COMMERCIAL	638	7.8	5.2	-2.6
INDUSTRIAL	556	6.8	4.6	-3.9
PUBLIC BUILDINGS + AREAS	1,378	17.0	11.3	+13.3
PARKS, PLAYGROUNDS	628	7.7	5.1	+2.6
STREETS	<u>1,849</u>	<u>22.7</u>	<u>15.2</u>	<u>+13.8</u>
TOTAL	8,156	100.0	66.8	+11.4
VACANT	4,044		33.2	-17.0

SOURCE: DEPT OF URBAN REDEVELOPMENT, ALBANY

## RESIDENTIAL LAND USE IN ALBANY (1966)

	<u>ACRES</u>	<u>% OF RESIDENTIAL LAND</u>
SINGLE FAMILY	1,877	60.4 %
2 FAMILY	655	21.1
3-4 FAMILY	310	10.0
5 AND OVER	<u>265</u>	<u>8.5</u>
TOTAL	3,107	100.0

SOURCE: DEPT OF URBAN REDEVELOPMENT, ALBANY

## YEAR MOVED INTO UNIT, CITY OF ALBANY

	<u>OWNER OCCUPIED</u>	<u>RENTER OCCUPIED</u>
1969 - MAR 1970	5.1 %	29.2 %
1968	3.9	12.9
1967	3.9	8.6
1965-1966	8.3	13.6
1960-1964	16.8	15.7
1950-1959	28.1	11.5
1949 OR EARLIER	33.9	8.5

SOURCE: US CENSUS OF HOUSING, 1970

## HOUSEHOLDS WITH AUTO AVAILABLE (1970)

	<u>TOTAL P.C.</u>	<u>NonWhite P.C.</u>
ONE AUTO	49.8 %	37.8 %
TWO OR MORE	15.7 %	5.9
NONE	34.5 %	56.3

SOURCE: US. CENSUS OF HOUSING, 1970

## DEMOLITION OF HOUSING FOR SOUTH MALL

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>NUMBER</u>
1962	450
1963	0
1964	1,820
1965	1,422
1966	0

TOTAL 3,692

SOURCE: DEPT. OF URBAN  
REDEVELOPMENT, ALBANY

## PUBLIC AND ASSISTED HOUSING, AS OF 1973

### LOW INCOME PUBLIC HOUSING

Thatcher Homes, 525 units  
Whalen Homes, 108 units  
Corning Homes, 292 units  
Lincoln Park Homes, 325 units  
Ezra Prentice Homes, 100 units  
Hampton Hotel, 100 units  
Westview Homes, 175 units  
Arbor Hill, 352 units  
Third Ave., 128 units  
South Pearl St., 79 units

TOTAL: 2184 units

### ASST'D OR SUBSIDIZED HOUSING

Livingston Village, 200 units  
Louden Arms, 318 units  
Denker Village, 222 units  
Stonehenge, 212 units  
Cleveland Park, 164 units  
Adams Park, 180 units  
Executive House, 120 units  
Dudley Park, 263 units  
South Mall Towers, 345 units  
Central Towers, 307 units  
Northern Blvd., 100 units  
B'nai Brith, 191 units  
Ohav Shalom, 212 units  
Arbor Hill (UDC), 126 units

TOTAL: 2960 units

SOURCE: Department of Urban Redevelopment, City of Albany.

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